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U.S. MILITARY/SECURITY ASSISTANCE FOR SAUDI ARABIA
STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR THE 1990s

BY

COLONEL LAWRENCE R. MAYES, USAF

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

U.S. MILITARY/SECURITY ASSISTANCE FOR SAUDI ARABIA
STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR THE 1990s

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013
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ABSTRACT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. U.S. MILITARY/SECURITY ASSISTANCE POLICY	5
III. WHY SECURITY ASSISTANCE TO SAUDI ARABIA IS IMPORTANT	8
IV. CASE STUDY IN SECURITY ASSISTANCE: U.S. SALE OF AWACS TO SAUDI ARABIA	15
IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.	24
BIBLIOGRAPHY	29

U.S. MILITARY/SECURITY ASSISTANCE FOR SAUDI ARABIA
STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR THE 1990s

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nearly all the armed conflicts of the past forty years have occurred in what is vaguely referred to as the "Third World," to include the Middle East. During that period U.S. involvement in warfare, both directly and through military assistance, occurred in the Third World. Despite our often significant interest in these regions, our tools and tactics for American involvement are severely circumscribed. We are also often constrained by our need to "save" forces or advanced technologies for a possible conflict with the USSR. At the same time, our potential enemies in the Third World acquire increasingly more sophisticated weapons.¹ While potential conflicts in these regions are less threatening to our national interests than a direct U.S./USSR confrontation, they can still have a very adverse affect on our access, both materially and politically, to regions important to our national interests.

In this paper the author will explore the past and present effects of U.S. military assistance to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and how this assistance has extended our influence in that region in pursuit of U.S. national interests. It is because of a historical perspective by our adversaries in the Third World that

they see lesser risks when they attack U.S. interests or ally conflicts, that brings our need to assist nations like Saudi Arabia into focus.

We have many interests in the Middle East and Persian Gulf regions, thus the scope of this paper must be necessarily limited to only the more important of those interests. Simply put, U.S. national interests in Saudi Arabia revolve around our need to limit violence in this region so that the vital sea lanes for ourselves and our allies remain open through the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea -- Suez Canal. As the world's third largest producer of oil and largest world exporter of oil, holding 26% of the world's reserves, the strategic importance of this important commodity to the U.S. and Western nations is apparent.² With the strategic geographic location of Saudi Arabia on the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, the nation also sits astride the vital lines of communications to the other major oil producers of the region. U.S. influence in the region must be maintained in order to deny strategic opportunities for the Soviet Union and its proxies.³

This paper will take a sequential approach to study of the military assistance history of the U.S. with Saudi Arabia. To give this assistance some frame of reference, we will also look at the major Saudi Arabian adversaries in the region and their general military capabilities and threats they represent. This paper will then review the impact U.S. aid has had on Saudi Arabian capabilities and how these capabilities have furthered

U.S. interests in the region. This paper will then conclude with an assessment of the success of U.S. efforts to further U.S. national interests through this military assistance approach to wielding power in the region, and finally some recommendations for future efforts along the same line will be offered.

In the interest of providing insights of timely significance, this paper will focus primarily on the period after World War II; the author's reasons, not the least of which are the facts that Middle East politics throughout this century have been characterized by volatility and unpredictability, being essentially to illuminate how this volatility has affected the U.S. and USSR struggle for dominance in the region. It is important for the reader to remember the seriousness of protecting U.S. interests in the Third World; as characterized by authors Nogee and Spanier. "So long as the Soviet Union and the United States are engaged in a struggle for power any arena of conflict contains the possibility of catastrophe."⁴ It is with this ominous thought in mind that we begin.

ENDNOTES

1. Paul F. Gorman, Discriminate Deterrence. Report on The Commission On Integrated Long-Term Strategy, p. 13.

2. Richard F. Nyrop, ed., Saudi Arabia, A Country Study, p. xvii.

3. Paul F. Gorman, Discriminate Deterrence. Report on The Commission On Integrated Long-Term Strategy, p. 13.

4. Joseph L. Nogee and John Spanier, Peace Impossible -- War Unlikely, p. 316.

CHAPTER II

U.S. MILITARY/SECURITY ASSISTANCE POLICY

In order to understand the reasons for U.S. military/security assistance (hereinafter referred to as security assistance) to our allies, one must look at stated U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives. The Department of State's Fundamentals of U.S. Foreign Policy states that American objectives and interests include "protect the security of our nation and its institutions, as well as those of our allies and friends."¹ It then goes on to indicate "the pursuit of stability and peace in the Middle East is a constant struggle requiring steadfast resolve and that progress is measurable by an accumulation of small steps."² Additionally, this policy guidance states, "We must act effectively to ensure the flow of oil through the Persian Gulf."³ More specific to our strategic needs in this region is the economic well-being of the free world insofar as the Middle East possesses 63% of the free world's oil reserves and produces 25% of its crude oil.⁴ U.S. influence in this region provides an important counterweight to the ambitions of the Soviet Union and Iran in the area. The Soviet threat to U.S. interests is not fully defined or even predictable to any significant certainty, but their invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 certainly increased joint U.S.-Saudi Arabian security concerns. The Iranian overthrow of the Shah and establishment of a fundamentalist government with a fervent anti-

Western posture has also posed strategic security concerns to both the U.S. and Saudi Arabia.⁵ State Department policy in this regard concludes by stating: "The U.S. seeks to preserve the security and stability of friendly Gulf states that share our interests and objectives in the region. The U.S. considers an unimpeded flow of Middle East oil to be of such vital interest that two administrations have pledged to use force to protect it if necessary."⁶

This policy must not be accepted in isolation. On 25 May 1988, the President's Commission on Integrated Long-Term Strategy released its report. It stated, in part, that security assistance was the most important means to preserve free peoples against violence that could threaten vital sea lanes such as the Persian Gulf. It went on to say that security assistance programs of the U.S. have underwritten American foreign policy for 40 years and are regarded worldwide as tangible evidence of American commitment to national independence and peaceful development.⁷ Since World War II the supply of armaments to non-aligned and Third world states has become a major facet of the strategy of the superpowers. Arms transfers have also become an important way in which one superpower can signal to another the significance to the outcome of a current conflict or a possible future one -- as the U.S. has shown in arming the Arab states without becoming involved in the Middle East wars themselves.⁸ With these historical preliminary policy views in mind, we move to the

specific instance of Saudi Arabia and U.S. military assistance to them.

ENDNOTES

1. George P. Schultz, Fundamentals of U.S. Foreign Policy, p. 1.

2. Ibid., p. 5.

3. Ibid., p. 5.

4. Ibid., p. 56.

5. Richard F. Nyrop,, ed., Saudi Arabia, A Country Study, p. 214.

6. George P. Schultz, Fundamentals of U.S. Foreign Policy, p. 60.

7. Paul F. Gorman, Commission On Integrated Long-Term Strategy, p. 1.

8. Philip Towle, The Strategy of War By Proxy, p. 22.

CHAPTER III

WHY SECURITY ASSISTANCE TO SAUDI ARABIA IS IMPORTANT

The foundations of modern Saudi Arabia date from the middle eighteenth century through family alliances which became the house of Saud in the early nineteenth century. In the 1920s al-Rahman Saud consolidated tribes and gained territory in North and Central Arabia, and in 1932 al-Aziz declared the establishment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and made himself king.¹ The long military assistance relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia began in 1943 and since 1950 the Saudis have signed agreements to purchase over \$35 billion worth of equipment and assistance from the United States.² One could postulate many reasons for this military assistance arrangement, built around the U.S. policies for security assistance previously discussed; however, some recent events in the region highlight the threat to Saudi Arabia and U.S. national interests. During the 1970s the bilateral relationship between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia evolved into a key link within the Western political and economic system. In the 1980s the security of Saudi Arabia's increasingly valuable oil resources became vital to both nations, and the Saudis turned to the United States for the largest part of upgrading and modernizing its military.³

The Iran/Iraq war raging since the late 1970s until the cease fire in 1988 curtailed those two nations' oil production in

the Gulf. Iranian air and sea power shut down the principal Iraqi oil field for over a month. This resulted in a cut of Iraqi oil from a normal 3.5 million barrels a day to 450,000 barrels a day in December 1980. Iranian oil production suffered a similar lapse, from 5.5 million barrels a day to 1.5 million barrels a day.⁴ Although this disruption was minor on a world-wide scale, it was indicative of the potential that large scale Gulf warfare poses for impacting on availability and delivery of Gulf region oil. A full scale war between several large combatants, say Iran against Saudi Arabia with Iraq, Kuwait and Syria included, could cause major disruptions in oil flow to the Western nations.

Other threats to regional stability are small but violent wars such as the two Oman has fought in the past 20 years. North Yemen also has twice fought civil wars in the past 20 years, one of which had more casualties than all the Arab-Israeli wars combined, and which led to repeated Egyptian air strikes on Saudi Arabia, many launched from Egypt.⁵ Iran has threatened on three occasions to invade Kuwait. Iran has seized two sets of islands and one oil field from the Tombs and Abu Musas, has laid claim to Bahrain, and was involved in a Gulf-wide effort to subvert and arm the Shi'ite population of other states before the Iran-Iraq War.⁶

While each of these events has been resolved, to one degree or another, without serious detriment to Saudi Arabia or the

U.S., they certainly posed concerns at the time and remain potential concerns in the future. Disruptions of orderly oil flow from the Gulf region have economic affects to both the oil producing nations in lost revenue and to Western powers in fluctuating prices and unreliable sources of petroleum. Each conflict between the region's nations invites the interests and potential for intervention by the super powers. If the USSR should seize on one of these events and decide to project their own power into the area of conflict, say Iran, they would have a significant position from which to attempt control of the entire Gulf region. The Soviet "invasion" of Afghanistan at the "invitation" of the Soviet puppet leadership of Afghanistan is an example of the potential for Soviet intervention.

The destabilization of the region through regional wars and civil unrest simply makes the region liable for opportunistic world powers to take advantage, with an attendant loss of power for the U.S. or Saudi Arabia as one possible byproduct. As the Gulf's Arab states polarize from moderates in one camp to extremists in another camp, leaving others non-aligned and therefore caught in between, instability increases.

The scale of the potential military threat to Saudi Arabia is illustrated by the growth of the potential threat forces in the region: Iran has about 1,000 medium tanks and 300 first-line combat aircraft; Iraq has about 4,500 medium tanks and 500 combat aircraft; South Yemen has about 470 medium tanks and 120 combat

aircraft; North Yemen has about 100 medium tanks and 75 aircraft; and Ethiopia has about 950 medium tanks and over 150 combat aircraft, 70 of which could attack the south coast of Saudi Arabia.⁷

The above listed nations do not each represent a specific threat to the U.S. regional interest or to Saudi Arabia, and are not meant to be all-inclusive of potential regional enemies of the U.S. or Saudi Arabia. These are, however, the nations possessing the larger military forces in the region, Israel excepted, and those which have been involved in instances of regional instability in the past. The citing of their military might is to suggest their potential to wage war against one another or Saudi Arabia, thus threatening U.S. interests in the region. These forces have grown at roughly twice the rate of those of Saudi Arabia since the early 1970s.⁸

In addition to the regional threats posed by neighbors, the Soviet presence is a primary consideration as it potentially threatens U.S. national interests in the Gulf. Soviet forces face Iran and Eastern Turkey in the strength of 30 divisions, 5,400 tanks, and 725 tactical jet aircraft.⁹ Although the Soviets have recently withdrawn from Afghanistan, after almost 10 years of occupation, their strategic intent toward Afghanistan and Iran is still not clear. The Soviets have sought to extend their interests in the region through major military assistance programs, and the regional countries now receive approximately half of all Soviet arms delivered to the Third World.¹⁰ The

Soviets have a dominant role in Ethiopia and People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, including access rights that provide facilities and anchorages for a continued Soviet naval presence in the Red and Arabian Seas.¹¹

The U.S. participates in a number of programs to promote peace and stability in the Middle East. Forward deployed forces protect U.S. interests, and the U.S. provides security assistance to friendly nations in order to build up their capabilities to protect themselves and to help deter intraregional conflict.¹² However, U.S. forces are not forward deployed in any significant numbers in the Middle East/Persian Gulf regions, particularly ground forces. The U.S. naval forces deployed throughout this region are either too busy with previously assigned tasks or lack the requisite types and amounts of equipment and personnel to stand alone in U.S. power projections. Although the U.S. has demonstrated the ability to rapidly increase these forces when needed, a situation which makes this kind of rapid reinforcement unlikely or unnecessary would obviously be preferable. It is stated U.S. policy that the U.S. will act effectively to protect our interests in the Persian Gulf through U.S. presence and that of her concerned allies.¹³ This seems a clear appreciation by the U.S. that the presence of our allies in the region is a key feature in regional stability.

There is no mistaking the importance of U.S. influence in this region. In 1986 General George Crist, Commander-in-Chief of

CENTCOM, indicated the CENTCOM AOR, including the Gulf region, was for Soviet strategic interests no less than "the highest priority target for the expansion of Soviet influence in the Third World."¹⁴ President Reagan's Commission on an integrated long-term strategy stated:

The turbulence of the region, the importance of its oil to Western countries for the foreseeable future, the severe limitations of countervailing forces in the region -- all these factors combine to make it plausible that Soviet leaders might seize an opportunity to intervene -- for example, by taking advantage of an "invitation" to support a new revolutionary regime.¹⁵

The following chapter will focus on an example of how military assistance to Saudi Arabia is used in what in 1987 Secretary of Defense Weinberger called "a region where vital national interests were at stake..." and the objective of the U.S. was to "deny Soviet access/influence in a region which could threaten free world access to regional oil resources" as well as to assure the "stability and security of the Gulf States."¹⁶

ENDNOTES

1. Richard F. Nyrop, ed., Saudi Arabia, A Country Study, The American University, p. 205.

2. Anthony H. Cordesman, Saudi Arabia, AWACS and America's Search for Strategic Stability in the Near East, p. 5.

3. Richard F. Nyrop, ed., Saudi Arabia, A Country Study, p. 244.

4. Anthony H. Cordesman, Saudi Arabia, AWACS and America's Search for Strategic Stability in the Near East, p. 7.

5. Ibid., p. 8.

6. Ibid.
7. Joint Chiefs of Staff, The Military Balance, 1988-1989, p. 94-120.
8. Anthony H. Cordesman, Saudi Arabia, AWACS and America's Search for Strategic Stability in the Near East, p. 10.
9. Ibid.
10. Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Military Posture, 1988, p. 21.
11. Ibid., p. 22.
12. Ibid.
13. George P. Schultz, Fundamentals of U.S. Policy, p. 5.
14. Dore Gold, America, the Gulf and Israel, p. 42.
15. Ibid., p. 43.
16. Ibid., p. 56.

CHAPTER IV

A CASE STUDY IN SECURITY ASSISTANCE: U S. SALE OF AIRBORNE WARNING AND CONTROL SYSTEM TO SAUDI ARABIA

With the preceding background as a point of departure, we will now look at one pertinent example of how the U.S. has provided military assistance to Saudi Arabia, through the sale of the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), and the complexities this type of arrangement creates. This particular instance of military assistance is large in scale and broad in implication, thus serves as an excellent example.

To accomplish its objectives in the Middle East region, the United States is involved in selected security assistance.¹ Although every region of the world is of some strategic importance to the U.S., the Middle East has been one of the most vital for a number of years. The Reagan Administration viewed Saudi Arabia as one of its major political allies in the Middle East. The State Department has indicated that U.S. bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia are of strategic importance in the Gulf. Access to Persian Gulf oil is vital to the world economy because of the large volume of the oil consumed in the western civilized world which comes from this politically volatile region.² The U.S. and Saudi Arabia have had close military links over the years, and the Saudis have indicated they will permit the U.S. to use their bases in case of military emergencies in and around the

Persian Gulf, with some limitations.³

Ensuring the security of Saudi Arabia is one of the most important elements of western strategic interests, and no U.S. policy can be successful which does not keep the West's key source of oil, a large measure of which is Saudi Arabian, in friendly hands.⁴ The success of U.S. policy in the Middle East hinges in large part on maintaining close relations with Saudi Arabia. The U.S. must continue to aid Saudi Arabian military capability to defend themselves and deter aggressions against more conservative Gulf states. Continued success depends on whether the U.S. can give Saudi Arabia the military equipment and assistance it needs without creating a political crisis over any increase to the threat of Israel.⁵

Although there are many examples of U.S. military assistance throughout the Middle East, none brings the complexities of that process more into focus than the AWACS sale. It is for that reason the author has selected this case study for more complete review.

The sale of U.S. AWACS to Saudi Arabia, a process beginning in 1980 and reaching fruition in 1989, has been one of the single largest and more controversial military assistance efforts in recent years. As the Iran-Iraq war reached unpredictable levels, the U.S. deployed its own AWACS to Saudi Arabia in order to provide the Arabians with airborne surveillance. This deployment was established at Riyadh in 1980 and was known as "Elf One."

During the nine years Elf One was in existence the AWACS flew 6,112 missions, logging 87,021 flight hours.⁶ However, this U.S. AWACS presence was never intended as a permanent U.S. presence, and purchase and deployment of Saudi Arabia's own AWACS was completed in 1989, concurrent with U.S. AWACS withdrawal. This withdrawal was due in part to the Iran/Iraq ceasefire which was negotiated by the United Nations in 1988.⁷ What their own AWACS does for Saudi Arabia is give them the ability to operate effectively with other Gulf states' air forces, "net" its own fighters and surface-to-air missiles, and provide warning of low flying attack aircraft to its airfields and oil production facilities. It also gives them the ability to rapidly mass and control their F-15s against a large scale attack from their largest threat, the Iranians.⁸

This sale was particularly important because of its scope and the level of sophistication of the equipment. In addition to five AWACS aircraft, the sale included 101 conformal fuel tanks for their F-15s, eight KC-707 fuel tanker aircraft, and 1,177 AIM 9-L sidewinder missiles.⁹ This significant increase in military capability enhances the strategic value of Saudi Arabia as the center of conservative forces in Islam, which offers the Arab world modernization without radicalization. Its pro-western anti-communist position has been of immense importance in shaping the attitudes of the world's 750 million Moslems and more than 100 million Arabs. This greatly enhanced capability will insure

their large investments result in a military posture which can help deter much of the possible aggression in the Persian Gulf.¹⁰ A sale of this magnitude to any ally in the Middle East, giving them near state-of-the-art military capabilities in an unstable region of the world, obviously is a complex policy and military action. In addition to the basing promise for U.S. power projection in the event of Middle East hostilities, the Saudis have helped the U.S. in other important areas.¹¹

Saudi Arabia is a strongly anti-communist nation, playing a moderating role in oil price escalation of the 1970s, and raised its own oil production when necessary to keep supply and prices stable. They also invested billions of dollars in the U.S. commercial market at a time when the U.S.'s overall balance-of-payments situation was steadily worsening.¹² Although the sales were later found to be contrary to many U.S. interests, the Saudis are reported to have assisted in the U.S. arms sales to Iran in the hostage exchange effort in 1986. Saudi Arabia is also reported to have secretly contributed billions of dollars since the 1970s to movements and governments in a dozen countries to further Western, anti-Marxist interest, often at the urging of the United States. They provided \$15 million in arms, food and medicine to the U.S. backed Contra Rebels in the Mid-1980s; in the last two years of the war they provided \$500 million to the Afghan guerrillas fighting the Soviets; and in the late 1970s they provided sizable amounts of money to the government of

Somalia to help switch their alignment from the Soviet Union to the West, just to name a few of Saudi Arabia's efforts on behalf of the U.S. and the West.¹³

This type of moderate nation friendly to U.S. interests is of obvious value, and our enhancement of their military strength through the AWACS sale thus seems a good measure. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy told the house Foreign Affairs Committee in April 1986, that Saudi Arabia had supported every major diplomatic effort over the past five years to end the Iran/Iraq war, had made major and highly visible efforts to bring peace to Lebanon, and, although the Saudis had only occasionally played a prominent role in efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli dispute, their private efforts had been effective at critical periods.¹⁴ Certainly there are many pressures and influences brought to bear on the Saudis by the U.S. Military assistance is just one of the many tools available to help bring about cooperation between the two nations, but it is a large and important aspect of cooperative relationship building. Thus the combined effect of the various elements of influence is substantial; it is difficult to directly link one concession or agreement with one specific act or event, but there can be no doubt that the results on behalf of the U.S. are significant. This type of international support for U.S. interests by Saudi Arabia illustrates some of the potential benefits of military aid/security assistance programs.

However, this strong commitment to Saudi Arabia by the U.S. was not without its negative aspects. From the outset of discussion between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia on the AWACS sale, the Israelis posed objections. A strong debate, fueled by the Jewish lobby of the U.S. Congress, revolved around Israel's concern that growing Arabian oil and economic power already gave them a degree of influence over the U.S. that might threaten U.S. willingness to support Israel in a crisis. Among critics of the sale were the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Jewish War Veterans of the United States, and Americans for Democratic Action. The lobbying efforts for and against the sale of AWACS to Saudi Arabia were among the most intense ever experienced by Congress.¹⁵ As a result, many senior Israeli planners probably feared the political consequences of the AWACS sale far more than the military ones.¹⁶ One example of Congressional opposition was a letter to President Carter from the House International Relations Committee which warned that the sale would "for the first time, place Saudi Arabia on Israel's strategic map, raising tensions and increasing the likelihood of Saudi involvement in any future Arab-Israeli conflict."¹⁷ In the end the debate was decided on the side of the AWACS sale, but the issue illustrates the complexity of enhancing U.S. strategic posture through one ally when other U.S. allies have contrary interests.

The AWACS case is just one illustration of security assistance at work, yet it does serve to demonstrate the scope,

complexity and quid pro quo this type of arrangement provides. Other major security assistance deals between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia include 29 ships, small craft, shore facilities and other naval assets costing \$5 billion and sold under the Saudi Naval Expansion Program (SNEP).¹⁸ Another major case of military assistance is a \$1.1 billion contract with Boeing Aerospace for the installation and maintenance of a command, control and communications system.¹⁹ A final example of the magnitude of U.S./Saudi Arabian cooperation is the 60 F-15 fighters sold to Saudi Arabia in the late 1970s and early 1980s. These aircraft form the backbone of the Saudi air defense system and represent state-of-the-art equipment. The willingness of the U.S. to provide high technology aircraft in large numbers, mated with the sophisticated AWACS to provide a very credible air defense capability, clearly demonstrates the value the U.S. places on this important ally in this vital region of the world.

However, there are also some recent ominous signs that U.S./Saudi Arabian cooperation may be in some jeopardy. The U.S. turned down Saudi requests in 1986 and 1987 for a total of 60 added F-15 and almost \$500 million worth of air-to-air missiles.²⁰ In July 1988, the Saudis announced a \$30 billion deal to buy, among other items, 48 Tornado fighter bombers and air defense variants from the British.²¹ The Saudis' recently purchased Chinese CSS-2 Eastwind long range missiles.²² Both these purchases were the result of the U.S. Congress refusing the Saudi

requests to buy similar U.S. equipment. In May 1988 U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Murphy warned Congress that, "Refusing the sale of legitimate items on our part would not achieve the intended result."²³

ENDNOTES

1. Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Military Posture, 1988, p. 20.
2. Thalief Deen, "Middle East/Africa," DMS Market Intelligence Reports, July 1988, p. 1.
3. Ibid., p. 6.
4. Anthony H. Cordesman, Saudi Arabia, AWACS, and America's Search for Strategic Stability in the Near East, p. 1.
5. Ibid., p. 5.
6. John Ginovsky, "Communications Specialists Leaving Saudi Arabia," p. 19.
7. Ibid., p. 19.
8. Thalief Deen, "Middle East/Africa," p. 19.
9. A. Craig Murphy, "Congressional Opposition to Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia," p. 105.
10. Anthony H. Cordesman, Saudi Arabia, AWACS, and America's Search for Strategic Stability in the Near East, p. 7.
11. Thalief Deen, "Middle East/Africa," p. 7.
12. Murphy, p. 101.
13. Anthony H. Cordesman, Saudi Arabia, AWACS, and America's Search for Strategic Stability in the Near East, p. 108.
14. Murphy, p. 101.
15. Murphy, p. 106.
16. Thalief Deen, "Middle East/Africa," p. 3.

17. Murphy, p. 104.
18. Ibid., p. 14.
19. Thalief Deen, "Middle East/Africa," p. 10.
20. Ibid., p. 9.
21. Ibid., p. 3.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS:

As indicated in Chapter III, the Saudi Arabians have provided significant payback to the U.S. for the security assistance the U.S. has provided, and promise more in the event of hostilities in the region during which the U.S. may need basing rights or other support. Additionally, the many billions of dollars invested by the Saudi Arabians in U.S. defense industries through the military assistance program have had a positive affect on these important defense industries and the national economy.

The willingness of the Saudis to purchase equipment in large volume from other than U.S. sources and the attendant loss of sales and U.S. influence demonstrates how ephemeral these relationships can be. Although there is no immediate indication that the Saudis have lost their desire to support U.S. needs in the region, their non-U.S. purchases indicate they have important political and economic relations with other nations.

It is important to remember the Soviet Navy is increasingly capable of sustained distant operations and that they have enhanced their access to air and sea facilities in key strategic locations, including in the Persian Gulf through South Yemen.¹ The U.S. has met increased presence in the Gulf by the USSR through successful cooperation with the Saudi Arabians since

1943. Beginning in the 1950s, the U.S. has developed a strong military assistance program with the Saudis which has contributed to a strong relationship between the two nations. U.S. interests have been furthered by Saudi support, both politically and financially, to nations and efforts in support of the West and against Marxism. The emergence of Saudi Arabia as a militarily strong nation representing the moderate Islamic peoples has lent an important balance to the growing radicals in Iran and to the Soviet Union, who support them. These developments by the Saudis would not have been possible without the strong military assistance program provided by the U.S.

The Iran/Iraq war and the serious degradation of their oil flow in the late 1970s and early 1980s clearly illustrated, on a thankfully small scale, the negative impacts these types of events could cause if they occurred on a larger scale. Saudi Arabia's ability to moderate in the region, as a credible presence to counter Iran and indirectly by providing a point of focus for other Arab states in the Gulf, exerts a significant calming influence in the region.

Although the Soviets have now withdrawn from Afghanistan, their invasion and occupation of the country for almost 10 years indicate the potential for their expansion toward the Persian Gulf. The Soviet Union must pause in their planning; however, when confronted with the knowledge that Saudi Arabia might well serve as a platform for U.S. forces in the event the Soviets

threaten the sea lanes in the Persian Gulf or Arabian Sea. Any major power confrontation in the area would be significantly influenced by the logistical capabilities of the adversaries. If the Saudis allow U.S. forces to gather in strength on the Arabian Peninsula, it would greatly enhance the warfighting posture of the U.S. Despite Saudi Arabian friendship toward the U.S. over the past several decades, there exist today no formal political understandings that might permit the ongoing deployment in the Middle East of U.S. force levels even remotely comparable with U.S. forces stationed in Western Europe.² President Reagan's Commission on an integrated long-term U.S. strategy warned that a NATO-Warsaw Pact conventional arms agreement that shifts Soviet forces from Europe to east of the Urals would leave them 830 nautical miles from southwestern Iran, compared to U.S. forces relocated from Europe to the U.S. which would be 6,400 miles away.³ This type of significant shift in major combatant capabilities relative to the Gulf region makes our continued friendship with Saudi Arabia even more necessary.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Continued support of Saudi Arabia through an aggressive military assistance program is a must. The vital interests of the U.S. and her allies, particularly as they relate to Middle Eastern oil, dictate a strong support base, politically and militarily, in the region.

Mr. Murphy states in his study of Congressional opposition to arms sales to Saudi Arabia that, "The U.S. Congress may ultimately be responsible not only for a decline of American influence over Saudi weapons acquisition and deployment, but also for the loss of opportunities for close U.S.-Saudi cooperation on political and security matters in the Middle East."⁴ The author believes that waning influence in the Middle East is a posture the U.S. can ill afford.

Strong friendships forged through cooperation between nations are among the time-honored methods of nations extending their power and protecting national interests. These alliances can take many forms, and in recent decades the U.S. has often chosen to use foreign security assistance in the form of sales of military equipment as the method. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia have thus formed a strong relationship which serves the ends of both nations. It is imperative the U.S. continue its strong commitment to Saudi Arabia, therefore guaranteeing the continued support of Saudi Arabia to U.S. national interests in the Middle East.

ENDNOTES

1. James D. Watkins, "The Maritime Strategy," p. 5.
2. Dore Gold, America, the Gulf and Israel, p. 107.
3. Ibid., p. 43.
4. Murphy, p. 112.
5. James D. Watkins, "The Maritime Strategy," p. 5.

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